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ABSTRACT

Responding to complaints by New York City area employers about the lack of communication skills of City University of New York (CUNY) graduates, Baruch College (a CUNY college with a specialization in business) initiated a new program of communication-intensive courses to address the problem. One such course involved intercultural communication. The course focuses on experiential learning through student-facilitated discussions, work with an interactive computer writing tool, and an extensive ethnographic project (including an observation, library and Internet research, interviewing, an e-mail survey, and a formal presentation). All elements of the course are designed to achieve three goals: conscious analysis of communication techniques and their improvements; intensive communication practice; and content acquisition. Students reported having communicated more during this communication intensive course than during the rest of their academic careers. They especially appreciated the chance to facilitate their own small group discussions and to conduct a comprehensive ethnographic project. The course materials are included in the paper. (RS)

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ED 427 364

COMMUNICATION INTENSIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN: THE EXAMPLE OF A COURSE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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COMMUNICATION INTENSIVE CURRICULUM DESIGN:

THE EXAMPLE OF A COURSE IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

In recent years, employers in the New York City area have complained about the lack of communication skills in CUNY graduates. In the Fall of 1997, Baruch College (a CUNY college with a specialization in business) initiated a new program to address the problem. Part of the program is the creation of a new course format: the communication intensive course (CIC). Each department at Baruch College offers at least one of its regular courses in a CIC format, and students have to take eight CICs in the course of their studies before they can graduate.

To qualify as a CIC, a course has to meet certain criteria. (1) It has to emphasize writing and/or oral presentations. (2) It has to include readings other than standardized textbooks. (3) In addition to lectures, instructors have to use interactive forms of presenting course material. (4) Special provisions have to be made for students to receive personal and/or small group instruction. Instructors who teach CICs receive release time for the extra work and are assigned a communication consultant (usually a graduate student) who is available to help students on an individual basis.

The following course materials were designed to render communication intensive a course in intercultural communication. The course focuses on experiential learning through student facilitated discussions, work with an interactive computer writing tool, and an extensive ethnographic project (including an observation, library and internet research, interviewing, an e-mail survey, and a formal presentation). All elements of the course are designed to achieve three goals: (1) conscious analysis of communication techniques and their improvement, (2) intensive communication practice, (3) content acquisition.

Student-Facilitataed Discussions

On one of the two class sessions per week, students discuss textbook chapters. Each discussion will be preceded by short quizzes (true/false) on the content of the assigned readings. Then, the class breaks into small groups (of 6–8 students each) and discusses the respective chapter. Each class session, a different student takes on the role of the "gatekeeper" or discussion facilitator. What follows are the instructions for the gatekeeper, group members, and timekeeper, a description of grading procedures, and a form for the evaluation of the discussion.

Gatekeeper

1. Read your text carefully. Become an expert on your text. Note terms and concepts that may be unfamiliar to your group members and prepare definitions.

2. Think about a variety of good, stimulating questions to ask concerning the text and list them on the provided "Discussion Preparation" worksheet. Prepare paraphrases for the more complex questions; this will save time during the discussion, if group members request elaboration.

3. Decide how much time you would like to spend on each question. Before the discussion, inform the timekeeper of this timeline. The total discussion time (including warm-up and evaluation) is 45 minutes.

4. a. Discussions should start with a warm-up period reserved for clarification of terms and concepts contained in the reading assignment. Questions for clarification should be initiated by group members and can be answered by the group or the gatekeeper.

   b. During the discussion, ask the questions you prepared and listen carefully to what your group members say. Keep looking at the text at a minimum during the discussion.

   c. Facilitate group member interaction (i.e., make sure group members respond to *each other's* comments and don't just supply a series of monologues directed at you). Do so with gestures, verbal reminders, or requests for direct responses.

   d. To ensure clear communication, regularly summarize group member contributions (especially at the end of each question).

   e. Strive for a friendly and supportive atmosphere in which group members can feel secure. Mediate the clarification of misunderstandings. If conflicts arise, explore the differences, but focus on the issues, not the people. Try to reconcile disagreements.

   f. Concentrate on listening and keep in the background. It is very important that you don't dominate the discussion and don't voice your own opinion. You are like a conductor who makes sure the discussion moves smoothly and stays on track, but who doesn't actually participate.

   g. When the time for one question is up, take control of the discussion and lead the group to the next question. Do so gently but firmly, by summarizing contributions, providing an opportunity for brief additional comments, and then asking a new question.

   h. The most important job of the gatekeeper is to make sure that *all* group members get a chance to speak. If some group members are more quiet than others, bring them out by directing questions specifically at them. Encourage *equal* participation of all group members during each question.

5. At the end of the discussion, summarize the results of the discussion (i.e., progress made, main outcomes) and round it up. Then, lead the group in an evaluation of the discussion (see evaluation form). Collect the filled-out forms.

6. On the class session following your gatekeeping, hand in the filled-out "Discussion Preparation" and "Discussion Evaluation" forms containing the following information: (a) the definitions and questions you prepared, (b) a summary of your group members' evaluation, (c) your own evaluation and comments.

Group Members

Group members should participate actively and encourage each other to share insights and opinions. Direct your contributions at each other rather than the gatekeeper (incl. eye contact). Practice openness and intercultural sensitivity towards your fellow group members as well as your gatekeeper through verbal and nonverbal behavior. Avoid being aggressive, competing, dominating, playing around, or withdrawing. At the end of the discussion, be honest but constructive in your evaluation.

Timekeeper

One of the group members should be the timekeeper. This person should watch the time, tell the gatekeeper when the end of each section approaches, and when the discussion time is over.

Grading

Your overall discussion grade will be based on your gatekeeping performance as well as your participation as a group member (when someone else gatekeeps).

1. Your gatekeeping grade will be based on the following items (10 points each):

   Preparation

   - Potentially unfamiliar terms and concepts as well as definitions supplied
   - At least one question listed for each of the question categories

   Gatekeeping (as observed during 10 minute visit of teacher)

   - Time control/keeping discussion on track
   - Facilitating group interaction/prevention of monologues
   - Summarizing group contributions (esp. at the end of each question)
   - Clarifying misunderstandings/reconciling disagreements
   - Focus on listening/withholding own opinion
   - Encouraging equal participation of all group members

   Evaluation*

   - Summary of group members' comments complete
   - Gatekeeper's personal reaction and comments included

   * = While the *presence* of the evaluations summary and your reaction statement counts towards your gatekeeping grade, the actual content of these items will not affect the grade positively or negatively.

2. Your group member grade will be based on the active and interculturally open participation during the discussions for which someone else is the gatekeeper.

Discussion Evaluation--Peer Feedback and Reflection

Group Members

1. What was the best aspect of this discussion (e.g., nature of specific questions, insights gained, process)?

2. How could the discussion have been improved?

3. Was communication clear? Do you feel you understood everybody and everybody understood you? If misunderstandings occurred, were they clarified?

4. How do you feel about your contributions to the discussion? Was your speaking time and that of the other group members approximately equal?

Gatekeeper

Personal reaction and comments:

Interactive Computer Writing Tool

The second class session per week is reserved for lectures and activities expanding on textbook themes. Activities include pair and group work, self-evaluation instruments, and video excerpts designed to stimulate awareness of intercultural communication issues. Both textbook chapters and alternate day activities are the topic of the students term papers. In these term papers, they apply the content of the course to their own personal or professional situation.

The term paper as well as other written assignments are first submitted as drafts. For this submission, we use an interactive computer tool, called the "online essay." This tool allows students to submit drafts, read other students' papers, and receive feedback from peers, the consultant, and the instructor. (Each student is required to respond to a number of papers and provide peer feedback.) Students use the feedback to revise their drafts. They can also submit their revised, final papers through the online essay.

Ethnographic Project

Instructions: Select a culture other than your own for this semester-long project and investigate *deep-cultural* aspects of that culture (i.e., customs, behaviors, beliefs, values, etc.). Your culture of choice may be a culture in a different country, an ethnic group in the USA, a gender-based culture (e.g., feminist, gay or lesbian culture), a profession-based culture, a culture defined by geographical area, and organization (e.g., political groups, AA, sororities or fraternities), a culture based on physical ability or disability, etc. You may also investigate a region in the world currently exhibiting signs of cultural conflict or a culture-related conflict in the United States (e.g., the use of Native American names and symbols in sports or advertising).

Since part of the assignment is to approach and make contact with the new culture, you should not be a member of this culture in any way. Informants for your project may be found at school (maybe even among your classmates) or the metropolitan area at large.

The investigation of the culture of your choice should include the following elements: an observation, an e-mail survey, a literature review, and an interview. Results from these projects will form the basis for the final presentation at the end of the semester.

A. Observation

Go to a location where you can observe members of the culture you selected. Observe the people and events for 45-60 minutes and record your observations while you are there. Keep in mind to describe and not interpret, to look beyond preconceived boundaries, and to consider different perspectives.

Hand in a 500-600 word report of your observation (please supply word count). As an introduction, provide a description of the time and physical environment of your observation as well as of the outward characteristics of the people you observed (e.g., age, appearance, clothes). Then, describe the observed events. To conclude your report, add at least 10 questions you have about the culture of your choice. These questions may have been raised during your observation or may have predated it. Please note that these preliminary questions are in no way to limit you; you may change them or add to them ad lib as your investigation progresses.

In view of your final presentation at the end of the semester, you may want to start collecting potential visuals early on in the project. Possible visuals include objects, posters, slides, video excerpts, photos, maps, drawing, etc.

B. E-Mail Survey

1. Establish an e-mail account and send a brief message to your professor to confirm that you are on e-mail. Please do so within two weeks from today. Make sure you include your name and your e-mail address in your message.

2. Subscribe to the survey list of Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections (IECC) at

   iecc-surveys-request@stolaf.edu

   Type the work **subscribe** in the message field and send the message. (Later, when you want to cancel your membership to the list, send the message **unsubscribe** to the same address.)

3. IECC Surveys is a worldwide list intended for assistance on surveys. Students send in their surveys and receive responses from other subscribers of the list. After you have subscribed to the list, you will receive surveys on a variety of topics in your mailbox (e.g., Africa, hockey players. etc.). Feel free to answer any of the surveys on the list. This is not a requirement, but it will provide you with an opportunity to hone your e-mail skills.

4. Compose your own survey and send it to your professor for feedback. Preface your survey with a short introduction (your name, college, and purpose of the survey). Your survey should consist of 10 questions on your culture of choice. Design your questions to fit the audience. If it's unlikely that the audience includes members of your culture, ask for outside perceptions rather than inside information. Also, the audience may not be familiar with intercultural terminology; so, keep your questions simple.

5. After you receive your professor's feedback, revise your survey and send it to the IECC survey list (slightly different from subscription address) at

   iecc-surveys@stolaf.edu

   Supply a subject heading that reflects the contents of your survey (e.g., **"Chinese survey"**) and attracts respondents. Include your professor in the mailing; i.e., "Cc" a copy of the survey to your professor at the same time as you send the survey to the IECC survey list. (This is important since it will show--on your professor's screen--that the survey was sent to the IECC list.)

6. Use the responses you receive for the general database of your ethnographic project. Forward one of the responses to your instructor.

Grading

To receive full points for this projects, send the following items to your professor (via e-mail) by the deadline:

a. The first message, confirming that you are on e-mail (within the two week deadline).
b. A draft of your survey (incl. the introduction) for feedback purposes.
c. A copy of your final survey (through inclusion in the IECC mailing).
d. One response to your survey. (If you don't receive any responses, you should send the survey out again under a different subject title to attract a wider audience. If there are still no responses, send an e-mail message to your professor stating that you didn't receive any responses. You will get full credit upon receipt of this message.)

C. Literature Review

Conduct research on the culture of your choice and supply a bibliography consisting of at least 12 sources. **Six** of the sources should be traditional print materials (e.g., chapters in books or articles in magazines, journals, or newspapers). (Note: If book chapters are included, make sure they are from a variety of authors.) The remaining **Six** sources should be derived from an Internet search. To list each reference in the bibliography, use the style of the American Psychological Association (APA) Publication Manual (available in the library).

Select the **three** most informative sources from the print materials and the **three** most informative sources from the internet search. **For each of the three print sources**, write a summary 250-300 words in length (please supply word count). Make sure you identify the reference at the beginning of each summary. Focus on the most interesting deep cultural information contained in each source. (Note: Do not use the abstracts available through the longview option of online searches for your summaries and make to sure to avoid plagiarism.)

Several books with articles on a number of cultures have been placed on reserve at the Newman Library (25th Street building). Before you conduct your own search, consult these books and include applicable articles in your report. To obtain the books, go to the reserve desk and ask for the them by call number.

LB 2376.4 .G368 1995	Gareis, E. (1995). *Intercultural Friendship: A Qualitative Study*. Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
GN 345.6 .O927 1994	Gonzales, A., Houston, M., & Chen, V. (1994). *Our Voices: Essays in Culture, Ethnicity, and Communication*. Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company.
E169.12 .R47 1982	Kottak, C. P. (Ed.) (1982). *Researching American Culture*. Ann Arbor, MI: The University Press of Michigan.
HM 258 .I52 1994	Samovar, L. A. & Porter, R. E. (1994). *Intercultural Communication: A Reader* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.
PE 1127 .S6 V65 1995	Verderber, K. S. (1995).*Voices: A Selection of Multicultural Readings*. New York: Wadsworth.

After you have checked the abovementioned books for articles on the culture of your choice, conduct your own search for books and articles, consulting CUNY PLUS or similar online catalogues in other libraries. You may also want to check out travel sections of book stores. An example of an entertaining and informative book series for travelers and businesspeople is entitled *Culture Shock* (e.g., *Culture Shock China)*. Cultures include Australia, Borneo, Britain, Burma, Canada, China, Denmark, France, Germany, Hong Kong, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, Korea, Malaysia, Morocco, Nepal, Norway, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Thailand, Turkey, USA--The South, and Vietnam.

For each of the three internet sources, supply a one-screen printout of the most pertinent information (either the first or a subsequent screen) and the URL (http://www etc.). To start your search, you may find the following sites interesting: <http://www.therail.com/cgi-bin/stops?9+0+/cgi-bin/station>, <http://home.miningco.com/cultures/>, and <http://www.webring.org/ringworld/arts/countries.html>.

Keep in mind that you are investigating elements of *deep culture* (i.e., customs, behaviors, beliefs, values, etc.) and try to find as much information about these elements as possible.

(Population statistics, national history, or geographical facts are considered *surface culture* and should not be included unless they are directly related to deep cultural elements.) Focus on interesting and unusual details that will provide good material for your final presentation. You will be graded on the completeness of your overall bibliography and the format, length, and substance of each selected source.

D. Interview

Conduct an interview with a member of the culture you selected for 30-45 minutes. Again, focus on aspects of deep culture (i.e., customs, behaviors, beliefs, values, etc.) and try to gather as much information as possible. Tape the interview and write a 800-900 word report (2-3 pages), following the instructions on the back. (Please supply word count.)

Two basic types of interview are the *information interview*, for which the questions depend on a specific topic, and the *life history interview*, which follows the chronology of the interviewee's life and works well with older informants. Choose one of these two interview types for your project.

While you may conduct the interview in the interview type of your choice and design your own questions, two topics should be included in all interviews:

- Please ask your informant what kinds of taboos exist in his/her culture (i.e., what topics are not openly discussed or make people feel uncomfortable, and which behaviors are not acceptable).
- Also ask whether people of other cultures at times do or say things that offend or bother members from your informant's culture (e.g., stereotypical questions, faux pas in etiquette, verbal or nonverbal glitches).

All parts of your ethnographic project should be conducted with the final presentation in mind. However, especially information on taboos, stereotypes, faux pas, and glitches are valuable so that your classmates may learn what to avoid when dealing with the culture of your choice.

Interview Techniques

Effective interviews require interpersonal sensitivity, good questions, and good listening on the part of the interviewer. Here are some techniques that will help you conduct a successful interview.

Atmosphere. Conduct your interview at a time and location convenient for the informant. Make the interviewee feel comfortable by approaching him/her in a very friendly and accommodating manner. When you meet, make some small talk to relax your interviewee and help him/her develop trust in your professionalism and goodwill. Also, during the interview, give your interviewee time to answer each question. Sometimes, short periods of silence are needed for interviewees to gather their thoughts; don't hurry.

Questions. Your interview should be conducted in the guided interview format; i.e., prepare some questions beforehand and ask of them during the interview, but remain flexible to ask additional questions if the interviewee's responses lead you to other interesting areas.

Different question types are usually used in interviews. Include at least one example of each of the following types in your interview:

Yes/No Questions: Yes/no questions are usually easy to answer and may therefore be good at the beginning of the interview to put the informant at ease and provide a warm-up for the more complex questions.

Short Information: Questions that start with "who, what, when, where, which, how many, etc." encourage short-information answers.

Long Information: Questions starting with "how" and "why" usually encourage long-information answers that lead to other interesting questions.

Elaboration: Elaboration questions (e.g., "Can you say more about this?" or "Could you elaborate a little on that?") request more information related to something the interviewee has already said.

Clarification: These questions ask for information that was implicit in the interviewee's previous response.

Interviewee: The wedding took place in April.
Interviewer: Of last year?

Summary: A summary question summarizes the previously stated information and requests that the interviewee verify the data.

Interviewee: When I was a child, we lived in Chicago. Then, at age 15, I moved to my grandmother's in Florida. After that, I went to college in Indiana.
Interviewer: So, you lived in Chicago, Florida, and Indiana.

Confirmation: A pronoun and auxiliary verb referring to the preceding statement are a good way to encourage confirmation and more information. Alternately, the phrases "Really?" and "Is that right?" have similar effects.

Interviewee: . . . and then I lived for one year in the Sahara Desert.
Interviewer: You did? (or Really?)

In your report, include the following:

1. Serving as the introduction, a brief description of your informant (e.g., age, background) and how the interview was arranged.
2. A transcript of the interview, including questions and answers. Make sure you include at least one example of each of the question types described above. List question type, question, and your interviewee's answer (e.g., Short Information Question: *Where do you usually meet your gay friends?* Answer: *At a café in the Village.*).
3. Focus on the most pertinent quotes from your respondent; i.e., quotes that provide the most substantial and interesting deep cultural information. Make sure that you include the information on taboos, stereotypes, faux pas, and glitches.
4. Serving as the conclusion, a brief summary of your feelings about the interview (e.g., what you learned about interviewing, what went well and what didn't).
5. The word count (800-900 words).

Part of your final presentation will be audio and visual support of your findings. If your interviewee agrees to be audiotaped, a brief excerpt from that tape would be an excellent addition to your presentation. For this purpose, make sure the tape is of good quality.

E. Final Presentation

Using the information you collected in your observation, library research, and interview, prepare a 5-6 minute presentation on the deep culture of the culture you selected. Your presentation should not be merely an account of your research; it should be a new entity that presents the most salient of your findings as well as any other information related to your chosen culture in exciting and attention-getting ways. Try to inform your classmates of deep-cultural elements with which they may not be familiar. Make your presentation engaging and insightful.

Your goal should be to inform and stimulate the audience's interest in the culture you selected. Use examples, anecdotes, etc. to highlight important aspects of the culture and add intercultural comparisons if necessary or helpful. Present the culture in a positive, or at least neutral light; do not judge negatively. Make effective use of at least three quality visuals (objects, posters, graphs, OHP transparencies, computer graphics) in your speech and incorporate an excerpt from the audio recording of your interview. If a recording is not available, provide another audio aid related to the culture of your choice (e.g., folk music, language samples). (Your audio aid should be of good quality so that it can be heard comfortably even in the back of the room.) A 4-5 minute question & answer session will follow your presentation; make sure you anticipate possible questions and prepare accordingly.

The presentation is the last part of your portfolio assignment. Please write an outline for your presentation and hand it in *before* the speech. A TV/VCR and a tape player for regular-size audiocassette tapes will be available in the classroom. If other equipment (e.g., a slide projector) is needed, please notify your instructor within two weeks of your presentation.

Your presentation should exhibit knowledge in basic communication theory and skills, including organization, the use of evidence, audience sensitivity, and verbal as well as nonverbal delivery elements. Talks are to be given in extemporaneous style, using a speaking outline consisting of key words only. Remember the basic guidelines of public speaking:

* Relate your material to the audience.

* Strive to be interesting.

* Avoid jargon and explain unusual vocabulary (write names on board).

* Compare the unknown to the known.

Debriefing

The instructor should provide feedback on the different parts of the ethnographic project as they occur. After the whole project is completed, the following issues should be discussed:

1. Which part of the project (observation, literature review, e-mail survey, interview, presentation) was the easiest? Which was the most difficult? Why?
2. What insights did you gain in the effectiveness of each parts of the project?
3. What would you do differently if you had to do the project again?
4. How has this project affected your perceptions of the culture you studied?
5. How can you use elements of the project in your daily life, career, or studies?

Conclusion

Students reported having communicated more during this communication intensive course than during the rest of their academic careers. They especially appreciated the chance to facilitate their own small group discussions and to conduct a comprehensive ethnographic project which allowed them to learn about and practice a wide variety of skills which are all applicable in the workplace, school, and home environment.

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